JW, LF, HR

8/1/72

Mr. George Cunningham, A.A.
Senator George McGovern
U.S.Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Cunningham,

This is a letter I would have written you long ago if I did not fear even the appearance of pressing or intruding. However, today it has a different context and I therefore do write.

Before the convention, in connection with some writing that part of which is completed, I had occasion to recall the Checkers speech. Unfortunately, after it was made, except for infrequent comment, the Democrats forgot about it. This forgetting by his opponents and by the press may be the secret to Nixon's subsequent career.

I do not have a copy of that speech. It may be that my recollection of its precise words is imprecise. However, I believe the essence is a poor-boy justification of a slush fund that, if I recall correctly, actually involved criminality. He was so poor, had such meager resources, that without this under-the-table taking of hidden and entirely unaccounted funds, he could not run his office, could not serve his constituents.

There could be no more public protestation of poverty. And there would seem to be no proper source of income other than salary during the campaign that followed this unusual speech. I therefore suggest that inquiry into his first publicly-reported expenditure after election, a property I know well from having known its previous owners, former Attorney General and Mrs. Homer Stille Cummings, would provide information of which the electorate should have knowledge. The property was worth enormously more than the publicly-reported purchase price. The building alone had to have been worth much, much more, and the grounds were extensive and in an exclusive area.

Joe Kraft's column this morning says of Senator McGovern what you may or may not find relevant, that "to win he must first make the election turn on the Character of the President."

My first-hand knowledge of Washington and politics goes back to the early 30s, and includes experience on the Hill. It also includes professional political analysis. It has been my observation, for whatever it may or may not be worth to you, that when they eschew the gut stuff of politics (the Character of the President), intellectuals and decent people generally are self-defeating. To put this more bluntly, if one has an opponent in a race for tax collector, and one has proof that opponent has taken graft, it does not promote the functioning of the democratic society not to come to grips with the opponent's record of personal integrity. I suggest it impedes the working of representative society.

In what to me are its recent excesses, the press has made the Nixon vice-presidency in itself a legitimate issue in the current campaign. Especially in its failures of that day, when it did not, really, fill its obligations in our society. During those days, by the way, Bill Costello, then Mutual White House correspondent and earlier with CBS, wrote a book on the many faces of Richard Nixon. I knew him when he was working on it. I do not remember who borrowed and hasn't returned my copy. It might find use today.

Best wishes,

Harold Weisberg